

Such deliberations have a happy tendency, by exhibiting our comparative situation with that of former ages, to teach us the absurdity of presuming on present perfection, or of fixing a boundary to any pursuit; they contribute to obliterate the prejudices resulting from established custom; and to open an unbounded field of the most luxuriant soil, gratefully productive to the hand of cultivation, and richly rewarding the toil of the labourer.

For this purpose, I conceive it will not be uninteresting to take some notice of the infant operation of canals, and of their progress from Eastern to Western climes; in which, we shall find, their importance did not escape the observation of some of the early improvers of society.

From the best historical accounts it appears, that in the Mediterranean sea navigation originated and flourished, that sea being the greatest inlet in the known world, and without tides, consequently seldom excessively agitated; also, containing numerous islands, and shores within sight of each other, it was particularly favourable to the young adventurer. Time, with such advantages, having improved the navigator in knowledge, and the surrounding countries in cultivation, the mind began to seek, in streams of artificial direction, those conveniences it had enjoyed on the watery expanse of nature.

The first enterprize of this kind, of which we have any account, is related by HERODOTUS, of the Cnicians, a people of Caria, in Asia Minor, who designed to cut through the isthmus which joins that peninsula to the continent; but who were so superstitious as to relinquish the undertaking because of an interdiction by an oracle.

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It was also a favourite project with both the Greeks and Romans, to cut a canal through the Isthmus of Corinth; and open a communication between the Archipelago and the Ionian Sea; to accomplish which, DEMETRIUS, JULIUS CÆSAR, CALIGULA, and NERO, made numerous, but unsuccessful, attempts.

The important junction of the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, by a canal through the Isthmus of Suez, has at various times occupied the attention of several kings of Egypt; PHARAOH NECHO attempted a canal from the Nile to the Red Sea, and 120,000 men perished in the attempt. In this great undertaking, it is also said, that, in after ages, SOLIMAN II. Emperor of the Turks, employed 50,000 men; and that the work was completed under the caliphate of OMAR; but afterwards was so entirely choked up by the shifting sands, and loose soil, as entirely to obliterate their immense labours.

As it has been frequently questioned in Europe, whether such a canal was practicable, in order to open a route to India nearer than that by the Cape of Good Hope, I shall beg leave to quote Mr. VOLNEY, who made it a part of his enquiry during a residence at Cairo and Suez in 1782; and who, having a just sense of the subject, exhibits the impracticability of constructing a permanent canal;—for the following reasons:

“*First*, It is certainly true, that the space which separates the two seas is not more than 18 or 19 ordinary leagues; it is true, also, that this interval is not intersected by mountains; and that from the tops of the terraces at Suez we cannot discover with any telescopes a single obstacle on the naked and barren plain to the North West; it is not, therefore, the difference of levels which

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prevents